

Pending storm overshadows beach fill dispute

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MANAHAWKIN BUREAU

Organizers postponed a Sunday meeting with a North Jersey attorney with experience in coastal litigation, while municipalities on Long Beach Island Friday geared up for a storm that could give its ailing beaches another beating.

June and Michael Logan, property owners in Long Beach Township, rescheduled their meeting with attorney Kenneth Poro for 2 p.m., Feb. 26 at the Holiday Inn on Route 72 in Stafford. The purpose of the meeting was to rally property owners to force modifications of the beach replenishment scheduled to begin this summer by withholding easements.

Meanwhile, public works departments the length of the island were gearing for both snow removal and road sanding and bracing for the potential of repairing stretches of beach and dunes gobbled up by storm-churned waves.

"Long Beach Island is the most vulnerable stretch of shoreline in the state, and for that reason any Nor'easter bears watching for residents," said Stewart Farrell, the Director of the Coastal Research Center at Richard Stockton College in Atlantic County.

Mark Mihalasky, a Surf City resident and head of research at the Stockton center, said readings from offshore buoys Friday showed 18-20 foot swells.

"Depending on the angle and if it hits at high tide, the damage could be substantial," Mihalasky said. "If the storm comes in at low tide, the sandbars will slow down the waves. But at high tide, it could be a different story." Farrell noted the erosion from the coming storm would not be as bad farther north in Monmouth County.

"The dunes and the homes on Long Beach Island are now so close to the high tide line that while the homes on pilings will be OK, the people won't like what they see when they return from New York and Philadelphia," Farrell said. "People in Monmouth County won't have anything to worry about because of the beach fill they had done years ago."

A small storm last week, with only 10 mph winds, forced Long Beach Township to spend \$150,000 on rebuilding the dune in front of two Brandt Beach homes where protective bulkheading was exposed.

"The property owners are in denial," said Beach Haven Mayor Deborah C. Whitcraft. "Most of the people living here now weren't here for the 1962 storm and think it won't happen again. I hate to envision myself saying 'I told you so' but a major storm is inevitable. There are homes around Merivale Avenue in the borough that are already in danger.

"Homeowners have two options. If they sign the easement and a storm takes their home they can rebuild it. If the don't sign and the town has to buy a portion of their property through eminent domain, the lot will no longer be a buildable lot," Whitcraft said.

"We're expecting erosion," said John Jones, the Long Beach Township public works superintendent. "Our first concern will be the streets. We may not worry about the beaches until Monday or Tuesday."

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